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# SOME CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SONG OF SONGS.

SUGGESTED BY TRAVEL IN PALESTINE.

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The study of the Song of Songs has received, during the last few years, various valuable contributions from American and European scholars. A careful study of the Song of Songs, supplemented by personal observations made in Palestine, during almost three years' residence, has convinced me that much remains still to be done before we shall have disentangled the mystery of the text and meaning of this collection of charming *Volkslieder*.

My study has led me to regard the Song of Songs as a combination of a northern and southern recension of songs, originating in southern Palestine, more especially around Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> The weaving-together has naturally been casual and accidental, so that it is not very difficult to separate the foreign elements—*i. e.*, those which have come from the north—from those which are original and southern. These northern elements are, briefly, as follows:

1. The idea of bridegroom and bride being regarded as king and queen. This idea is unknown in southern Palestine, especially in and around Jerusalem, as repeated inquiries in various districts have assured me. It is, however, familiar in northern Palestine and Syria.

2. The sword-dance. This is equally unknown in southern Palestine as executed by the bride. It is, as I had often occasion to witness, performed by the male guests. However, in the north it is executed by the bride herself, as also among the Bedu who live east of the Jordan.

3. The allusion to Damascus (7:5) and to the Lebanon, at a time when neither Damascus nor the Lebanon had any interest for the Jews, which appears strange in a song which is regarded

<sup>1</sup> I hope to present my theory in detail at an early date.

as originating in southern Palestine. The Lebanon is barely mentioned in late biblical literature or even apocryphal writings, except when older events are referred to.

Other arguments which point to a double recension are:

1. Distinct references to Jerusalem, Zion, and other southern Palestinian localities, which place us in the atmosphere of a different district.

2. A great number of doublets, which can be explained only by the fusion of two recensions of song into the Song of Songs.

3. The presence of the name "Solomon" in the song. This is best explained as being due to the fact that the people, to whom the songs came back from the north containing specific allusions to northern Syrian wedding customs which they did not understand, interpreted "king" as referring to Solomon.

4. The reference to the threshing-sledge which clearly points to a northern origin. While they are in everyday use in the Lebanon district, I have seen none used in southern Palestine, though I have watched the harvest in many villages, where, as it seemed, they would have been a decided saving of labor. Wherever found, they are regarded as an importation from the north. At Er-Ramleh in the Great Plain, I have seen not fewer than sixteen head of cattle at work on one heap treading out the grain.

The Greek manuscript to which reference is made is found in the Library of the Greek Patriarchate in Jerusalem. It was written by Laurentius Archiepiscopus Sina between the years 1593 and 1617. It has 122 leaves, paper, size 20 x 15 cm. cursive script.

1:3, 4. These two verses are a song of the women addressed to the bridegroom. The difficulty which vs. 3 presents has been obviated by Siegfried's emendation שִׁיִּירָק "which has been poured out" for תִּירָק. However, the change of person, vs. 4*a*, is perplexing. The speaker cannot be, in view of vs. 4*c, d*, a single individual, nor can the phrase "let us run" refer only to the bride and groom, as in that case lines *c* and *d* could not be explained. I propose to read בִּישְׁכְנֵנוּ "draw *us*" instead of בִּישְׁכְּנֵי "draw *me*." Lines *b* and *e* are irrelevant and later insertions. The poem has two stanzas of three lines each:

3. Lovely in (their) fragrance are thy oils,  
Ointment *which has been poured out* is thy name.  
Therefore do the young women love thee.

- 4, *a.* Draw *us* after thee, let us run.  
*c.* We will exult and rejoice in thee.  
*d.* We will praise thy love more than wine.

1:6. שֶׁהָרִחַת שְׁאֵנִי is an explanatory gloss based upon vs. 5*a*.

1:12. הַבִּלָּה has been substituted for an original דֹרֵי.

1:13. Instead of a bag of myrrh the young women of Palestine carry a small bunch of fragrant herbs inside the dress. On one occasion a young woman, seeking to show some kindly attention to my wife, drew a handful of sweet-smelling herbs from her bosom and offered it to her. For this purpose they employ more especially carnations, rosemary, and above all sweet basil.

1:17. Read פְּרָחִים "blossoms" for בְּרוֹתִים. For רֹהֲטָנִי read with Siegfried and some MSS רֹהֲטָנִי = our flooring. The picture here is of a scene out-of-doors (*cf.* 1:16), and not indoors. The "beams of our house" are the overarching branches of cedars or cypresses, the green couch of vs. 16 is the flooring of vs. 17, *i. e.*, the flower-studded grass which has sprung up in this sheltered place; except to one who has actually seen it, the vivid wealth of coloring in such a spot is hardly conceivable. The speaker—a child of nature—conceives of herself as a flower among the flowers (*cf.* 2:1). To regard this as the description of a house is contrary to vs. 16; that of a bed (Budde) is not merely contrary to the sense of the passage, but to oriental life and custom, for even at the present day, although in certain wealthy harems bedsteads are to be seen, they are a modern introduction, and rather for ornament than use. I am reminded, by the interpretation of vs. 17 as "bed" or "bedstead," of an occasion when some lantern-slides, illustrative of Bible scenes, were exhibited at a religious meeting in Jerusalem, one of which, that of the flight of the holy family to Egypt, was greeted with laughter and cries of: "Fancy Sitti Miryam riding on a side-saddle!"

17. The beams of our house are cedars,  
*Our flooring is of flowers.*

2:1. הַבְּצֹלָה cannot be the *colchicum*, which does not blossom in early spring in the plain of Sharon (*cf.* Post, *Flora of Syria, Palestine and Sinai*, pp. 808 *sq.*). It is perhaps the *crocus vitiellinus*, which blossoms from December to February (*cf.* Post, *op. cit.*, p. 772).

2:9. Read אֵל לַאֵל "or a stag," in accordance with MSS. 442

ἢ ἐλάφῳ, instead of אִזְלֵי הָאֵילִים . If in one part of the line the lover is compared to a grown animal, why in the next clause should he be spoken of as the young of an animal? The prominent idea (cf. vs. 8) is that of the swiftness and strength of early maturity. Emend 2: 17 in conformity with the above.

3: 2. Omit נָא with LXX A. Delete בשׁוּקִים וּבִרְהוֹבוֹת with MSS. 370 as a later expansion suggested by בַּעִיר . The clause בַּקֶּשֶׁתִּי וְלֹא מִצֶּאֱחָיו is a gloss from 5: 6; it anticipates the sequel.

3: 9. The poem 3: 6–11, belonging to the Syrian or northern recension, consists of six stanzas alternately of four and three lines each. Vs. 9 has, however, only two lines according to the MT. In view of vs. 7 *b, c*, the two lines of which form a synthetic parallelism, it seems to me that the lost member of vs. 9 formed a similar parallel. Perhaps something like מִן הָאֲרָזִים הַבְּחֹרִים “from the choice cedars,” must be read as third line.

3: 10. For תּוֹכֹי read הָדָר “its ornament” (cf. Zech. 6: 13; 10: 3), the pronoun referring to the seat. Line *d* is meaningless “paved by love,” even if we explain אֶהְבָּה (with König, *Lehrgebäude*, III, 332 t. 107) as meaning “love on the part of the daughters of Jerusalem.” Graetz, Siegfried, *et al.* consider אֶהְבָּה miswritten for הַבָּנִים “ebony” (Ezek. 17: 15 Qeri). But this does not help us much. According to vs. 9, the palanquin is made of the woods of Lebanon, which do not include ebony. The emendation of Graetz is due to the fact that he and his followers laid stress upon the description of the palanquin, and not on its still more precious contents. The true value of the אֶפְרִיִךְ is that it conveys the far more precious bridegroom. Around this idea the poem centers and therefore I propose to read יִצְפֵּן אֶהְבֵּי “it hides my beloved,” instead of וּצֹף אֶהְבָּה . מִבְּנוֹת is an early corruption of an original מִמֶּנִּי “from us.” יְרוּשָׁלַם is an insertion due to the southern recension of this song. Vss. 9 and 10 therefore read:

9. A palanquin made for himself the king  
From the wood of the Lebanon,  
*From the choice cedars.*
10. Its columns he made of silver,  
Its banisters of gold.  
*Its seat, purple is its ornament.*  
*It hides my beloved from us.*

3:11. **בנות ציון** makes the line too long, and is an interpolation in accordance with the phrase **מבנות ירושלם** of vs. 10.

4:2. The description of the shining whiteness of the maiden's teeth is marred by the introduction of an entirely foreign and irrelevant idea. The whiteness of the wool of newly shorn sheep which have just come from the brook where they have been washed is a very fitting comparison, but what does the phrase, "which all of them cast twins, and there is none of them without young," mean in this connection, as the *tertium comparationis* is the whiteness! The reference to sheep would easily lend itself to such an expansion, and it can be due only to a glossator.

4:3. The translation, "like a split of the pomegranate is thy temple" (Budde, Siegfried, *et. al.*), suggests to me little more than a gash in the forehead of the unfortunate maiden. **פלה** cannot have here the meaning "piece," as RV. As we have in vss. 2 and 3a a description of the teeth and lips, the reference to the temples is perhaps out of place. However, the split in the pomegranate, showing its round fruit, may well be likened to the opened lips showing the rows of pearly teeth. Vs. 3b may have been intended to give us the complete image in detail described in vss. 2 and 3a. In accordance with this view, I propose to read **בְּרִמּוֹן** instead of **הָרִמּוֹן**, delete **רָקִתָּהּ**, and divide the verse at **שִׁפְחוֹתֶיהָ**. The phrase "from behind thy veil" is here and in vs. 1 a gloss (Siegfried). Vss. 2 and 3 read as emended:

2. Thy teeth are like a herd newly shorn,  
Which have just come out of the water.
3. Like a thread of crimson are thy lips,  
*And thy mouth is lovely like a split in a pomegranate.*

4:4. The difficulty of understanding this verse was felt by the early translators, who rendered the phrase **בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת** variously. The import of the first line seems to me to have been misunderstood. In harmony with the beautiful features is the well-set neck of the maiden, fittingly compared to the stately and graceful tower of David. The word **בְּנוֹי** is perhaps a corruption of **בֵּין** "between," and the inexplicable word **לְתַלְפִּיּוֹת** may have taken the place of an original **צִוְרֵיָהּ** "thy necklaces;" *cf.* vs. 9. This completes a picture which is exactly parallel to that of the preceding line. As the tower of David gains in appearance by the comparative unimportance of the walls on either side, so the

maiden's neck may be said to gain by the two silver chains which are attached to the headdress of the bride, and fall beside the cheeks, fastening below the chin. As the poem describes the figure of the maiden, vs. 4 *b, c* is irrelevant. The lines being descriptive of armor, seem to me to be an expansion of a mental picture of the "tower of David." The second line of vs. 4 is vs. 5, which is only one line long.

4:5. As the breasts are never referred to as *two*, but simply as *breasts* (*e. g.*, 1:13 [7:8]; 7:9; 8:10), except 7:4, which is a doublet of 4:5, nor the other members of the body which are in pairs specified as such by the addition of the number *two* (*e. g.*, lips, 4:3, 11; 5:13; cheeks, 1:10; 5:13; shanks, 5:15; feet, 5:3; hands, 5:5, 14; eyes, 1:15; 4:1; 5:12; 6:5; 7:5; hips, 7:2), I delete on the same analogy the tautological שְׁנֵי before שְׁפָרִים and also before עֲפָרִים. The reconstructed verse reads:

Vs. 4*a*. Like the tower of David is thy neck *between thy necklaces*.

Vs. 5. Thy breasts are like young twins of the gazelle, feeding among *anemones*.<sup>2</sup>

4:12. The change of פֶּל into פֶּן (LXX, Graetz, Budde, Siegfried) does not improve the verse. It is more conceivable that the second נָעִל is due to a scribal error. This would give us:

A closed garden is my sister, bride,  
A spring of water sealed.

4:13. רִמּוֹנִים = "pomegranates," fruits and not trees; *cf.* 4:3. This reference to the maiden's form is of a kind frequently met with in the popular songs of today; *e. g.*, "Thy breasts are pomegranates of the Dimas" (*unhudak rummām ad-dīmās*). "Precious fruits" must stand in apposition to pomegranates, therefore delete עִם נָרְדִים. כְּפָרִים עִם נָרְדִים looks too much like the preceding phrase, and seems to be due to an incorrect dittography, moreover, the word נָרְדִים with which vs. 14 begins seems to be in some measure responsible for this error. We should perhaps take the words "spikenard and saffron" of vs. 14 to vs. 13, so that the emended verse reads:

Thy sprouts are a garden of pomegranates.  
Precious fruits, Spikenard and Saffron.

Vs. 14, which is too long, would also gain in metre by this simple change. Finally the clause עִם נָרְדִים is omitted in MS. 442.

<sup>2</sup> For the explanation of this word see 5:13.

4:14. This verse is still unusually long (see above). Vss. 12, 13, 15, and 16 have only two lines to the verse. As the fragrant herbs are mentioned without any further qualification of genus, the additional words, "with all the trees," before "frankincense," are out of keeping with the rest, and seem to be due to incorrect dittography of vs. 14*b*β. Add the conjunction before **בַּר**.

Calamus and cinnamon, frankincense *and* myrrh  
And aloes with all the chief spices.

5:4. **הַמֵּה** has not the meaning of "feeling compassion," but rather that of "being heated;" *cf.* **הַמֵּה שֶׁכֶּר** "a heating drink" (Prov. 20:1), or the Talmudic **הַמֵּה** "to desire, lust."

My inward parts lusted for him.

5:11. For **תַּלְתָּלִים** read **גְּדִלִים** "twisted, braided;" *cf.* **גְּדִלֵּן** "plait, braid of hair." The Bedu beau still braids his tresses, allowing them to fall over the shoulder in front. The plaits are considered a great beauty, and are evidently intended here.

5:13. **שׁוֹשַׁנִּים** is perhaps the *ranunculus asiaticus*. The scarlet anemone, moist with raindrops, is a fitting comparison for the fresh lips of the maiden.

Wazf on the Beloved (c. 6:10—7:1-6). The poem has four verses of four lines each. The beginning of this poem is perhaps found in 6:10, according to various commentators.

6:10. As the maiden appears here under the image of gentle and mild light, the phrase "unapproachable as warriors" seems the more unsuitable in this connection, and may be an insertion due to the Syrian recension of these songs, a reference to the sword-dance characteristic of Syria.

7:1 completes the first verse of the poem. Fearing that this beautiful apparition might disappear as suddenly as the glow of the sunrise in the morning sky, there is a cry "Stay! stay!" so that the eyes may satiate themselves with so fair a picture. Read therefore **שָׁבִי** "stay" (Bickel) instead of **שׁוּבִי** "return." The reading **שׁוּבִי** arose from the idea that this was the description of a sword-dance rather than of her personal charms. That the sword-dance is a notion foreign to the original song, and due to the Syrian recension, is further illustrated by the two last lines of this verse, which are connected with the preceding only by the irrelevant question: "What do you behold in the Shulamite?" The answer, **כְּמִחֻלַּת שְׁנֵי חָיִים** "like a dance of two companies," is



a reminiscence of the sword-dance, although the text in its present form cannot be easily explained. One can get a general impression of the appearance of a person who is dancing, but such a minute description as we have in vss. 2 *sqq.* of one who is whirling in the mazes of the flashing sword-dance is impossible.

6:10*a, b.* Who is she that looks down as the dawn,  
Fair as the moon, clear as the shining sun?

7:1*a, b.* *Stay! stay!* o Shulamite!  
*Stay! stay!* that we may look at thee!

7:3. The comparison of the "belly" to the low, oblong heap of precious wheat upon a threshing-floor is a happy one. The image, however, is incomplete and marred by the next line: "surrounded by *anemones*." As the heaps of grain are shaped upon the threshing-floor, and are there only seen to the best advantage, it seems to me that a phrase like *אֲשֶׁר נִעְרְמָה עַל-הַפֶּתַח* "which is heaped up upon the threshing-floor" stood originally in the place of *סִיגָה בְּשׂוֹשָׁנִים*. Besides, this line and vs. 4 are a doublet of 4:5, although the order of the lines has been reversed. The thus emended verse reads:

Thy navel is a round goblet;  
It shall not lack wine.  
Thy belly is a heap of wheat,  
*Which is heaped up upon the threshing-floor.*

7:5. "Pools of Heshbon" are not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, but the Pool of Hebron is known (2 Sam. 4:12), and its mention in this connection is more probable than that of Heshbon, a distant town in Moab. I therefore suggest that *חֶשְׁבֹּן* is miswritten for *חֶבְרוֹן*. Following the LXX *ὡς λιμναι*, it is better to read *כ* before *בִּרְכוֹת*. This emendation commends itself in view of *כַּמְגִּיד* in the following line. The phrase *עַל-שֶׁעַר בְּחִירִים* is an explanatory gloss. *הַלְבָּנוֹן* belongs to the Syrian recension of the song, and is perhaps an early substitute for an original *דָּוִיד* (*cf.* 4:4). The phrase *צוּפָה פָּנֵי דַמִּשְׁק* "turning unto Damascus" belongs likewise to the Syrian recension of the song, for to a man living in the Lebanon, Damascus would naturally be the ideal city; for the Jew living in Palestine, at the time when this song was composed, it had little or no interest. To complete the fourth line of this stanza, I take the first line of vs. 6 with it. This poem is incomplete. The emended verse reads:

- Vs. 5. Thy neck is like a tower of ivory.  
 Thy eyes are *like* the pools of *Hebron*.  
 Thy nose is like the tower of *David*.  
 Vs. 6*a*. Thy head is above thee like Carmel.

7:9. הַגֶּפֶן, which is not necessary for the understanding of אֲשַׁכְּלוֹת (cf. 7:7; Isa. 65:8; Mic. 7:1), is perhaps better omitted for the sake of metre.

7:10. The word הֶקֶן seems to me scarcely consistent. The mouth can serve as a receptacle, a cup for wine, but can scarcely be regarded as the liquid itself. As, however, the spittle of the maiden is often compared by the lovers in popular Arabic poetry to something of exquisite taste, I propose to read רק "spittle" for הֶקֶן. הָדָרִי conveys no clear meaning in this connection, and I believe that it has crept into this verse from vs. 11. For לְמִישְׁרִים I read לְמִחוּק "sweetly," taking it with הוֹלֶה to the next line. For שְׁפָתִי read שְׁפָתִי "my lips." The rest of the line I find incomprehensible. It is the lover who is tasting this "wine," and not those who are sleeping. The whole phrase is perhaps a marginal gloss.

Thy *spittle* is like the best wine,  
 It goes down *sweetly* sliding over *my* lips.

7:12. The word כְּפָרִים is translated in the RV. by "villages;" so Budde; others take it to mean "cypress flowers" or "henna flowers." The first translation is not borne out by vs. 12, nor does it seem quite suitable in this connection. The translation "cyprus flower" or "henna flower" is derived from the Aramaic, but such a rendering of the Hebrew seems to me not wholly beyond question. The word in 4:13, *q. v.*, may be a scribal error, and I am inclined to read in this passage the more general term נֶצְרִים "flowers" (cf. 2:12), which is more in harmony with the non-specific word שָׂדֶה of l. *a*.

Come, my beloved, let us go to the field,  
 Let us lodge among the *flowers*.

8:6*b*. The two lines of this half-verse have been variously explained, especially the word שְׁלֵהבְּתִיָּה, which offers the greatest difficulty. However, it seems to me that the problem may lie in another connection. In the first place, the verse may be divided at כְּשֶׁאֵיִל, making אֶהְיֶה the subject of both verbs עָזָה and קָשָׁה, for which read תִּקְשָׁה. The subject of the second half of

the verse becomes קנאה, for which read קנאה "its passion" (*cf.* Gesenius-Kautzch, *Hebrew Grammar*<sup>26</sup>, 1898, § 91*e*). רשפיה is perhaps miswritten for שרפה, unless we should read the imperfect תשרה "it burns." Read כרשפי after the analogy of כמות and כשאול. The ש of שלהבתיה is a dittography of the ש of אש, and the rest of the word perhaps an inaccurate dittography of אהבה from the line above. The verse thus emended reads:

For love is strong as death, *it is inflexible* as sheol,  
*Its passion burns like* flames of fire.